


Mr. Ford's Own Page



WHEN two unreasonable parties refuse to reach an agreement, their quarrel should be confined to themselves alone; it should be prevented from doing harm to others. But when two reasonable parties cannot come to agreement, it is time to look behind the scenes for a third party whose interest is to keep them quarrelling. This applies to labor disputes as well as other disputes. Sometimes both employer and employe are unreasonable and do not seek agreement but conquest; in which case their unreasonableness ought not to be permitted to cause inconvenience or loss to the public. But there have been occasions when both employers and employes were reasonable enough to be able to reach an agreement, and were prevented by hidden influences.

It should not be forgotten for a single minute that though a strike may mean loss of money, time and peace of mind to all directly concerned—to workingman, manufacturer and public—it does not necessarily mean the same loss to everyone.

There are interests that make money out of certain kinds of strikes. If these strikes did not pay somebody, there would be fewer of them.

An analysis of the matter shows that there are three kinds of industrial disputes.

First, there is the justifiable strike—the strike for those proper conditions and just rewards to which the workingman is in all fairness entitled.

The pity is that men should be compelled to use the strike to get what is theirs by right. No American ought to be compelled to strike for his rights. He ought to receive them naturally, easily, as a matter of course.

These justifiable strikes are usually the employer's fault. Some employers are not fit for their job. Employment of men, direction of their energies, arranging that their reward shall be in honest ratio to their production and to the prosperity of the business—that is no small job.

An employer may be unfit for his job, just as a man at the lathe may be incompetent. The lathe man gets into trouble with his work, and so does the incompetent employer with his. Justifiable strikes are a sign that the boss needs another job—one that he can handle.

The unfit employer causes more trouble than the unfit employe. You can change the latter to a more suitable job. But the former must usually be left to the law of compensation.

The justified strike, then, is one that need never have been called if the employer had done his work as he ought.

BUT there is a second kind of strike—the strike which may be named The Strike With a Concealed Design. In this kind of strike the workingmen are made the tools of some hidden manipulator who seeks his own ends through them. Whoever this manipulator may be, his designs will not stand the light.

To illustrate this kind of strike: Here is a great industry whose success is due to having met a public need, to its efficient and skilful methods of production, and to its known record for just treatment of its workingmen. Such an industry presents a great temptation to speculators. If they can only gain control of it they can reap rich benefit from all the honest effort that has been put into it. They can destroy its beneficiary wage and profit-sharing, squeeze every last dollar out of the public, the product and the workingmen, and reduce it to the plight of other business concerns which are run on these low principles.

Their motive may be the personal greed of the speculator, or they may wish to change the policy of a business whose example is embarrassing to employers who do not want to do what is right by their employes.

But how gain control?—that is the speculator's problem. One of the simplest ways is The Strike With a Concealed Design.

It works this way: The industry to be attacked cannot be touched from within, because its men have no reason to strike. So another method is adopted. The business in question may keep many outside shops busy supplying it with parts or material. If these outside shops can be tied up then the great industry may be crippled, and that is what the speculators want.

So strikes are fomented in the outside industries. Every attempt is made to curtail the factory's source of supplies. It is a simple game when once understood, and the public has no idea how often it is played.

Now, if the workingmen of the outside shops knew what the game is, they would refuse to play it, but they don't know; they serve as the tools of designing capitalists without knowing it. There is one point, however, that ought to rouse the suspicions of workingmen engaged in this kind of strike. If the strike cannot get itself settled no matter what either side offers to do, it is almost positive

proof that there is a third party, a hidden hand, interested in having the strike continue. That hidden influence does not want a settlement on any terms. Its whole profit is in the trouble and in the continuance of the trouble.

If such a strike is won by the strikers, is the lot of the workingmen improved? After throwing the industry into the hands of outside speculators, are the workmen given any better treatment or wages?

Who is most likely to work with the workingman along lines of progress and prosperity: the manufacturer whose home is where his plant is, whose reputation among his neighbors is dear to him, whose interest in his employes is born of acquaintance and daily fellowship?—or the outsider, the speculator, the profiteer, who does not know his men from iron spikes and whose only interest in the industry is to squeeze dollars out of it until it is dry?

That is the pity of some strikes which linger on and on after settlements are possible—the deluded strikers are fighting the battles of cunning speculators and do not know it.

THEN there is a third kind of strike—the strike that is provoked by the Money Interests for the purpose of giving Labor a bad name. The American Workman has always had a reputation for sound judgment. He has not allowed himself to be led away by every shouter who promised to create the millennium out of thin air. He has had a mind of his own and has used it. He has always recognized the fundamental truth that the absence of reason was never made good by the presence of violence.

In this way the American Workingman has won a certain prestige with his own people and throughout the world. Public Opinion has been inclined to regard with respect his opinions and desires.

But there seems to be a determined effort now being made to fasten the Bolshevik stain on American Labor, by inciting it to such impossible attitudes and such wholly unheard of actions as shall change public sentiment from respect to criticism.

It is quite in keeping with the higher disorderly elements that they should employ the lower disorderly elements for the purpose of destroying the morale and reputation of the American Workingman. All the disorder does not originate with the workingman. Much of it comes from higher up.

The American Workingman's most valued asset is his reputation for cool-headed, balanced judgment and respect for law and order. If he loses that, what does he gain?

But—and here is the point—if he does lose that, the powers that would exploit him and reduce him to the lowest form of wage-slavery, would be the gainers. Losing his good name, the American Workingman loses all; his enemies are the gainers.

It is time for us to ask some questions: If the workingman does not make money out of strikes, who does?

It is time for every striker to ask himself: Who stands to make money out of this strike? Who will get the chief benefit if we break down this industry? Whose game are we playing, anyway?

The man who makes profit out of strikes, be he billionaire manipulator or self-seeking labor leader, is a menace to the nation, a traitor to the well-being of humanity, and the personal assailant of every workingman.

In the second and third kinds of disorder which have been described here, the concealed speculator orders the strike; the dishonest labor leader plans it; the rowdy element fans it into violence—and the honest misled workingman pays for it, and continues to pay!

Anyone who knows the American Workingman as he really and naturally is, must be convinced that he does not want to be the tool of evil designers who are not his friends and who cannot build prosperity. Some people make prosperity; other people sap it; the latter devitalize and destroy it.

There ought to be high wages everywhere—as high as the business will warrant; and any business that is serving the world and is efficiently managed will warrant it. There ought to be profit-sharing too, that each man may be a partner and not merely a "hand."

But it is not the boss who makes high wages; it is the men. If the boss stands in the way of men getting what they earn, he is not fit to be boss. The day has come when such a man will not be able to keep workmen in his shop.

Once the boss picked out his men. Now men are able to pick out their boss.

Big wages are not philanthropy. Big wages are plain business rights.

The speculators who are always ready to stir up labor trouble are not interested in high wages. They are usually interested in hindering the man who pays high wages. They want to hurt him, to drive him out of business. The American Workingman will not play that game, once he understands it.